CLAY GEERDES'

Comix Wave

CLAY GEERDES' COMIX WAVE 125
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The American public believed in the due process of law though they were the most criminal populace in the world.

Mario Puzo
The Fourth K, 1990

Dear Clay,

I see that Martin Goodman just died. The obit I read said he created Captain America. Oh, yeah?

-Wally Davis.

Dear Wally,

Oh, man, these obituaries are something else, aren't they? Jack Kirby came up with Captain America in 1941 about the time William Marston was dreaming up Wonder Woman to try to get little girls into reading comic books. I just read two glowing obits on Bill Gaines and both of them gave him credit for MAD. No mention of Harvey Kurtzman, Will Elder, or any of the guys who actually did the magazine. Whaddaya gonna do? When they did a movie about Archie a year or so ago, John Goldwater took creative credit on the film. They'll probably stick that in his obit. It was Bob Montana who created Archie back in 1945. Hey, this is capitalism we're talking about here. The people who own things in this country always try to take credit away from the slaves who create and do the work.

-Clay

Now I know. Pat Brady, who does the beautiful art for the strip *ROSE IS ROSE*, is a man. He did the cover for the Winter, 1992 issue of *RADIANCE: The Magazine for Large Women*. Turns out Brady is 43. He's from Louisville, KY, and now lives in a little town in Illinois. He says, "the path to syndication is not complicated. I drew two weeks worth of comic strips, made photocopies of them, and sent a set to each of the major newspaper feature syndicates." All turned him down but United Media; they took the strip and it appeared for the first time April 15, 1984, in about 60 papers.

Since 1985, Joe Bob Briggs has been telling it like it is *or was* in **WE ARE THE WEIRD**. This zine deals in horror movies and the horror of popcult. In the latest, Joe Bob wonders why most talk shows have become all hype and no real talk. **WATW** is getting longer and heading toward magazinedom, so Uncle Clay says check out a free sample. POB 2022, Dallas TX 75225.

Jim Ryan's **ANARCHAOS**, a hand made book, is $12.50 pp. "Some reprints, some new, some jams with others, all sorts of mixed media," says Jim. I'd say the ug/newave collector would be wise to get one of these.

CITY LIMITS GAZETTE is $15 a year now. Steve Willis. POB 390, McCleary, WA 98557-0390. The current issue contains an interview with the founder of CLG, Bruce Chrislip.

THE MANGROVE NEWS publishes funny stuff out of Summerland Key, Florida [POB 305, 33042]. Cartoons, strips, panels, satire, and other goodies. Get in touch. Wheel and deal.

SLINGSHOT is the nineties version of the old Berkeley **BARB**. This is the radical paper of 1992, written mostly by activist students who are into things like animal activism, pro-choice, gay rights. It's published out of Eshleman Hall at UC Berkeley [room 700, 94720] in case you want to get in touch. A dollar might get you a sample copy, but don't quote me.

Howard Kurtz did an article about Garry Trudeau in the Washington **POST** in late May, 1992. "Is Trudeau getting away with Murder?" I like this quotation from Trudeau: "Political cartoons are a kind of reality cocktail--part fact, part fiction, part serious and part frivolous--and they don't always go down smoothly."

I recommend **LOOKOUT #37**, an opinionzine by Lawrence Livermore whose writing I know from Bruce Anderson's **ANDERSON VALLEY ADVERTISER**. $2, POB 11374, Berkeley, CA 94701.

Lynda Seaver did an article on black superheroes in the Oakland **TRIBUNE**, June 4, 1992, P. B-1. "The Cipher, the Savior, B. B. & The Diva." Marvel has revived **Luke Cage** and comics about black superheroes are doing well in the Bay Area right now. **Brotherman** and **Zulu Nation** are selling well. A note on those doing comicological research. Newspapers are usually stored on microfilm and kept at main libraries where they may or may not be available to you through interlibrary loan. When they are not, the library will usually sell you a copy of the article for a small amount of money, but you have to have the specific reference. For this reason I am including that type of information in my newsletter. You need the date, page, and title. C.G.

CEREBUS 158 contains the 8th part of Dave Sim's *MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS* story.

EL VIBORA 148 is $10 from J. M. Berengueuer, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona Spain. This beautifully produced mag keeps up with the European comics scene of which Gilbert Shelton and Robert Crumb are now a part. **KISS COMIX 7**, the ultimate sex comic is $10 from the same address. Always include an age statement with your first order for anything having to do with sex. you can have all the violence and gore you want at the age of three, but in puritan America sex continues to sell best when forbidden.

William M. Gaines
1922-1992

Bill Gaines died June 3 at 70. I met the creator of EC back in the early seventies when he was touring to promote a book about himself. Bob Beerbohm and I went up to his room at the Clift Hotel in San Francisco for a chat. Without Bill, we might never have had any adult comix. He didn't create or draw a lot of the stuff he published at EC, but he kept the company together and it was one of the strongest influences on underground comix. Some obits give him sole credit for **MAD**, well, it was Harvey Kurtzman who created **MAD** and we all know that, but it was Gaines who kept it going. The big Question is who inherited that huge collection of zeppelins Bill had hanging around his office?

A fourth-grader at Parker School in Billerica, Mass., wrote a nice newspaper article describing **15 Ways to Kill Your Sister.** Some of the possibles included hiding a cobra under her pillow, squishing her head with a clamp, or tying her to the front bumper of a car with no brakes. Gladys Cerrato, who supervised the student paper, thought it was a creative thing, but she was reprimanded by the powers-that-be and school officials have reassured anguished parents [and sisters, we hope] that future issues will contain articles that are appropriate.

Don't you love it? I went to see **Batman Returns** the day it opened. Me and about a thousand 8-11-year-olds in bat hats and t-shirts. This mean-spirited movie could be titled **150 ways to kill and main your sister.** Didn't you love the shot of that cat chewing on Michele Pfeiffer's fingers? But Warner-Time-DC know the kid mind. This Batman outgrossed that last one.

The people of America did not want to be equal, they wanted to be rich. Nearly all the states had their own lottery with prizes running high up into the millions. More people brought lottery tickets than voted in the national elections.

Mario Puzo
The Fourth K, 1990

Dear Clay--

What's the best history of comics and where can I find it?

-W. Simms

Dear WS,

There is no best history of anything. It all depends on who you ask. There are a number of books about the comics, comic books, comic and cartoon characters, and there is a great deal of overlap in all of them. All have serious problems and pass them along to the researcher. Those who have written about comics include insiders and outsiders but few would be considered intellectuals or scholars. It's easy to tell. Take a look at any history and see if there is a bibliography. Does the writer name his sources so you can follow up on a theme or artist that interests you? If he doesn't name his sources, why not? How do you know he isn't making it all up as he goes along, comics being the fantasy medium they are? When Maurice Horn was putting together his *Encyclopedia of the Comics* and it's grandiose companion *The Encyclopedia of Cartoons*, he solicited articles on various subjects and trends from different people and he printed what he got back. The problem was many of these people wrote their pieces off the top of their head and didn't check any of their facts and dates. And Horn didn't check their data. This lead to a game which was carried on by many of us for years, counting the errors in the Horn books. Don Thompson used to keep the latest count in his editorials in The Buyer's Guide.

When I got interested in comics again circa 1967, there were only a few reference books and they were out of print. Becker's *Comic Art in America,* Coulton Waugh's *The Comics,* and a collection of essays entitled *All In Color For A Dime* were it. A few years later, Steranko's *History of The Comics* came out and I think it is the best coverage to date of the mainstream superhero comics though it has no bibliography and is prone to errors which one can only attribute to the faulty memories of the artists and writers themselves. Today there are hundreds of books about the comics, many of them quite good. Problem is, they are seldom bought by libraries and they only remain in the comic book stores for a short while.

Libraries still suffer from the Oz syndrome. When Frank Baum was writing the Oz books in the early 1900s, they were all best sellers, but librarians rejected them along with the rest of the boys and girls series books. The argument had to do partly with snobbism and partly with shelf space. Buy one and the kids would keep asking for the next and the next and you could have an entire wing of the library filled with nothing but books about Dorothy and the Rover Boys and Aunt Jane's Nieces. Books about comics were not a problem until recently, because there were only a couple and they were bought by some librarians, and subsequently stolen. I talked to a librarian in Berkeley and she told me it was difficult to deal with any book that attained collector value. Oz books are expensive and you can't put a book that a collector will pay a hundred dollars for on the shelf in the Children's Section of a library. It will either become damaged or stolen post haste. She showed me a copy of Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* with pages torn out of it. The library copy of Becker's *Comic Art In America* also had missing pages . A mint copy of the Wertham first edition with the bibliography goes for as much as $200 these days. So much for the library.

If you become a serious student of comic art, you will have to assemble your own library, then you will have to realize that *you can't take any of the books for granted. You have to check everything for accuracy*. When I started doing comic articles in the late sixties, I talked to primary sources and accepted what they said as true. It seldom was. I learned I could count on a few people to have accurate information, but I had to double check others. There were a number of underground comic publishers and artists around in 1969, but most of them worked on their own and they had not met each other. I introduced a lot of these people to one another and got them together, with a certain amount of resistance, for the first Underground Comix Convention [April 20-22, 1973]. There were and are many different trends in comic art and these artists were not at all of like mind. I got to know all of them peripherally and a number well enough to maintain my historical interest in the subject. I started my newsletter *COMIX WORLD* in October of 1973 and as publishers gave me review copies of their comix I wrote about them and passed along information about the artists.

Go to a comic store. There is where you will find both in and out of print books about comics. Look them over and get one. Waugh's *The Comics* has been reprinted and is a good introduction to the medium. He worked at King Features Syndicate for many years and knew most of the people he wrote about. For statistics and publication data on the early comic books, see library copies of *Motion Picture Herald* and *Advertising Age,* both of which used to give monthly and annual sales figures.

There is a lot of research left to do in the field of comic art. More and more educated people have come into the business in the past decade than ever before and the image of comics is changing rapidly. I suspect we will see the medium leave the nether world of popular culture and attain the respectability it deserves in the 1990s. Personally, I get a little bored with people who think comics are nostalgia. Hey, get real. It's a huge business with thousands of people involved from creation to consumption, and there are just as many readers around who would be interested in reading biographies of people like Jerome Siegal and C. C. Beck as they would books about actors.

Getting publishers to realize this is something else again.

--Uncle Clay

Dear Clay

I enjoyed reading your explanation of why people collect things [CW 121]. In general I enjoy the newsletter the way it is now, with lots of your opinions and anecdotes. Sure, a lot of your articles are negative but just the fact that you're speaking out gives me hope.

Sincerely,

Jerry Riddle.
Anchorage, Alaska

Dear Uncle Clay--

Why do people persist in calling comic magazines comic books?

--Jerry Dmitrios

Dear Jerry--

Just another one of those little conventions we are stuck with, pal. Back in the early days, newspapers were folded but not stapled or perfect bound so it is likely when Max Gaines put together his first collection of the newspaper comics and had it folded and stapled by a bindery it became a comic book in the minds and jargon of the people who did the work. By the fifties, it was a matter of measured format, because Harvey Kurtzman was able to move MAD from comic book to magazine simply by changing the size and eliminating the interior color. Kurtzman did this to evade the Comics Code of 1954, but the move did more than this because it put MAD among the magazines on sale and away from the comic book rack.

Magazine comes from the French word for department store [magazin] and I'm not sure it is all that appropriate in reference to comics. A copy of Superman filled with stories about the title character certainly doesn't qualify, but some of the anthology titles might be diverse enough.

In the forties, comic books were trash to many parents [mine, for sure] while magazines were quasi-respectable. *Book* has taken on many different meanings in our time. You bet on a race, you place bets with a *bookie* who is a guy who *makes book*. You go on vacation, you *book* a room. If none are available, the place is *all booked up*. You play a sax, you *book* a gig with a club. You get into it with the police and you get *booked*. A book is no longer just a book but a good read. The *Good Book* is *The Bible* to many people, while a *dirty book* is one that has sex in it. Today's comic book may be a lot of different sizes and shapes and page lengths from the 3x4" minicomic to the 8 1/2 x 11" *magazine* format.

When I was a boy, I would say, "Mom, can I get a comic?" Today, a comic is a comedian or comedienne, so logically, a comic book would be a book about a comedian, huh? Well, Coulton Waugh's book *The Comics* is about the early strip artists, not stand up comedians who do schtick in night clubs. Everyone would have understood that in 1947, but today Waugh's title is misleading.

--Uncle Clay